



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT:

MICHELLE MOWERY JOHNSON

(615) 313-4707 (OFFICE)

(615) 272-0845 (PAGER)

STATE OF TENNESSEE OFFERS CASH ASSISTANCE TO ELIGIBLE KATRINA EVACUEES & SUSPENDS SOME CHILD CARE LICENSING RULES

*DHS ANNOUNCES THE FAMILIES FIRST 'EASE' PROGRAM AND ALLOWS TEMA SHELTERS TO
OPERATE CHILD CARE CENTERS*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Tennessee Department of Human Services is working quickly to address the immediate needs of the thousands of Hurricane Katrina families staying in shelters and seeking refuge in Tennessee. Governor Phil Bredesen today signed Executive Order Number 28, which temporarily suspends some child care licensing rules for hurricane relief shelters recognized by the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) and modifies the Families First program to better serve evacuees. Families First is Tennessee's TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) welfare-to-work program.

The state is temporarily modifying the Families First program to allow one-time cash assistance payments to qualifying Hurricane Katrina evacuees. The purpose of these payments is to facilitate movement from shelters to permanent residences, assist evacuees in gaining employment, and/or help families return home when possible. The program is called Families First EASE (Emergency Assistance for Evacuees).

To be eligible for Families First EASE, an applicant must have sought refuge from one of the affected counties in Alabama, Mississippi, or Louisiana and be caring for a child under 18. Children in the care of non-relatives may also be eligible. Application/eligibility determination for Families First EASE must be made in a DHS county office or conducted by DHS personnel through a face-to-face interview. No phone interviews will be permitted.

If a family participates in the EASE program, they will be prohibited from receiving regular Families First program benefits for three months. These payments are not intended for evacuees who are having their immediate needs met in a shelter and do not have a plan to leave the shelter in the short term. The EASE program will allow for the one-time cash payments of \$750 (1-2 person household), \$1,250 (3-4 person household) and \$1,500 (5 + household).

Several DHS child care licensing rules are also being suspended to allow shelters recognized by the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) to operate child care without a license. In addition, licensed child care agencies will not be required to have health or immunization records on file before the children of evacuees can enroll in care. Safety rules and laws remain on the books for all licensed child care agencies.

The expedited Food Stamp program is also being operated in all DHS county offices across the state. This program entails potential recipients filling out short applications and undergoing a brief interview with DHS staff to verify eligibility. Applicants should receive their Food Stamp cards within a few days of applying.

The State of Tennessee is carefully coordinating its response to the fallout from hurricane Katrina. Governor Bredesen has asked all departments and agencies in state government to work closely together to provide help and services to evacuees who are coming to Tennessee. Regular briefings on Tennessee's response to hurricane Katrina are available through the Governor's office at 615.741.3763.

For a list of local DHS offices, visit http://www.state.tn.us/humanserv/st_map.htm.

CITIZENS PLAZA, 15TH FLOOR
400 DEADERICK STREET
NASHVILLE, TN 37248
615.313.4700